



# THE CITY OF AUGUSTA

WILLIAM R. BRIDGEO, CITY MANAGER

To: Mayor and Council  
C: Department and Bureau Directors  
Fr: City Manager Bill Bridgeo  
Re: 2016 in Review  
Da: January 9, 2017

As we prepare to engage in the process of setting goals and objectives for the coming calendar year, a summary review of 2016 is appropriate. It's always something of a marvel to me that so much Council and staff attention ends up being devoted to items that are unanticipated but quickly advance to the head of the line once they emerge. The two that most obviously come to mind are the complicated and emotionally charged issues of blasting/quarrying in the vicinity of the Grandview neighborhood and zoning related activities prompted by developments in the West Side neighborhood. Countless hours of Council review and of City staff time were spent as the Mayor and Council sought to fairly balance the rights and needs of different constituencies while, at the same time, avoiding placing the City in an indefensible legal position. This included grappling with the contentious issue of adopting a six month moratorium on group and boarding homes after the Board of Zoning Appeals overturned a Code Enforcement Office denial of a building permit on the grounds that our ordinance was too vague. As an indicator of the level of City engagement on these two issues, our legal bills for the year directly related to them were \$15,000 for the blasting issue and \$9,200 for the zoning issues related to group homes, etc.

(And, of course, lest you have put it out of your mind, there was the issue of bedbug infestation and the crafting – after much public input and angst – of an effective ordinance that now protects the most vulnerable of our residents.)

Council made clear at the beginning of the year that the efforts we initiated in 2015 aimed at addressing the problems of substance abuse and related criminal activity needed to continue to be a priority in 2016. To that end, our Police Department put forth significant effort in all three areas of what consensus opinion believes to be necessary to effectively address this society-wide dilemma. On the enforcement side, there was enhanced partnership with the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency (MDEA) including assigning one of our detectives to them for an extended period thus increasing local drug enforcement efforts. We conducted four Hot Spot events last summer in collaboration with several other law enforcement agencies. We executed eighteen search warrants where arrests were made and drugs, guns and contraband were seized. On the

treatment side, primarily through the good work of Deputy Chief Mills, we collaborated with other area police departments and treatment providers to craft grant applications to fund programs to divert low-risk offenders from jail into treatment alternatives (our first effort was unsuccessful but the partnerships created are being used to seek alternative funding. On the prevention side we have beefed up our DARE program training and program offerings in the schools, continued the very successful prescription drug take-back program and participated in a number of public forums.

To the goal of promoting our long-term economic development, as its Chair, Mayor Rollins convened three meetings during the past year of the Economic and Workforce Development Committee. In addition to interacting constructively with the State's Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), the committee heard from a group based in Winthrop suggesting an ambitious visioning process for the Capital City that included a concept of a new VA medical center (and led to a meeting with key players and the U.S. Secretary of the Veterans Administration); they had a presentation from Developer Kevin Mattson on the future of the Central Maine Commerce Center; and a presentation from Richard Parkhurst and associates on downtown development and the Colonial Theater project.

Over the years, we have worked hard to take full advantage of Maine's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) laws and regulations. By doing so, we have been able to do a good job of addressing pressing infrastructure needs, avoid large increases in what we pay for storm water charges to the Greater Augusta Utilities District, and support ongoing economic development efforts and downtown revitalization and associated Augusta Downtown Alliance activities. In 2016, Council either created or amended TIF's to construct the new North Augusta Fire Station and buy a \$1 million replacement ladder truck; created the new Western Avenue TIF (Homewood Suites) to fund the \$6 million renovation and expansion of the Hartford Fire Station (Headquarters) approved in November by the voters; created a new TIF for a JS McCarthy Printers expansion (as well as successfully securing a \$560,000 CDBG grant for them in the process); created a downtown housing TIF for the saving and redeveloping of the large dilapidated building at 275-287 Water Street (now owned by Richard Parkhurst) spurring the development of new ground floor commercial space and a dozen new modern apartments on the upper floors; created a new TIF that enabled the expansion (and probably retention in the City) of Performance Food Group and the hundreds of high quality jobs they provide; and appropriated (with voter approval) another \$2 million in TIF-generated funds for street and sidewalk improvements City-wide. All of these initiatives were marshalled through a complex process that included approval by the DECD. Ralph St. Pierre and the professional staff in our Development Services Department were key players in getting this all done.

The capital improvement milestone of 2016 was undoubtedly the completion of construction – two months ahead of schedule and \$400,000+ under budget – of the Lithgow Library renovation and expansion. This \$12 million project was an outstanding example of what can happen when local government can leverage its public resources to attract private donations (in this case almost \$3 million) to create a deep source of community pride for generations to come.

Among Council's goals for the year was achieving an "age-friendly" designation from AARP. With the help of dedicated volunteers like Bob and Carol MacDougall, not only was that achieved but we were awarded an \$8,000 grant from AARP to fund a community survey and pursue related work. Our Age-Friendly Committee is ambitiously pursuing a number of initiatives designed to improve the lives of our seniors. (2016 also saw the opening of the Augusta Housing Authority's new 47 unit senior housing facility at the former Hodgkins School – another example of the power of collaboration between City government and partnering agencies.) This year, our Capital Improvement Program (CIP) also included funding for replacement public signage designed to be more age-friendly.

Council's desire to support the work of the group formed to address the issue of childhood hunger and homelessness was advanced by Councilor Grant's efforts to craft a partnership between the City and the Augusta Food Bank and the Boys and Girls Club that resulted in the establishment of a "Kids Pantry" at the Buker Community Center to ensure that no child need go hungry during summer and other vacations.

A year ago, the Council was intently focused on improving the built environment in the City. It identified three action items, all of which have been accomplished. First, you studied, crafted and adopted a property maintenance ordinance that has already been employed to address several long-standing problem properties throughout the City. Second, you adopted (after extensive study and public discussion) an historic district ordinance and review board (an important step in becoming a "certified local government" by the State Historic Preservation Commission – achieved in September - and U.S. Department of the Interior – currently pending) as well as a new downtown historic district. Third, you adopted a progressive "complete streets" policy modeled after those in place in several other Maine cities (and we used the principles enumerated in that policy when we reconstructed Cony Street Extension).

There was unanimous Council support last January for the effort to restore the Colonial Theater and upon completion of the library project you provided a great shot in the arm to the not-for-profit group undertaking that project by promising a \$300,000 matching grant from the funds left over from the library project should they achieve their fund-raising goals. No vibrant community can reach its potential without a thriving downtown and we are well along on that path. Restoration of the Colonial Theater is, as it should be, essential to realizing that potential. (And speaking of downtown, your willingness to fund the Water Street Historic District grant

program and the subsidized loan program made possible by Kennebec Savings Bank's partnership – as well as waiving building permit fees for multi-family housing improvements – sent a strong message of support to the downtown community.)

Anchoring downtown is Mill Park. The Mill Park Advisory Committee led by Councilors Paradis and Bilodeau crafted improvements (ultimately included in your 2016 CIP) that will be constructed in the spring that includes an attractive river walk and an in-depth architectural study of the remaining brick building on the property.

As you know, each fall I teach a course in municipal administration at UMA for public administration students. One of the key messages I try to impress upon them is that municipal governments exist to provide a wide variety of important services to the residents and visitors in a conscientious cost-effective manner. If that does not happen, then achieving a set of admirable goals is really for naught. Thus, it is noteworthy that again this year our outside auditors presented us with a clean opinion (no findings) on the performance of our General Government operations and our enterprise funds. That's a credit to the City's department and bureau directors who, with their employees, on a daily basis, deliver quality services within strict budgetary constrictions.

I look forward to this year's goal-setting process, and as the Mayor said the other night, to an even more promising year to come.